

Prelude

'NO!' I cried, 'Father, please, you do not comprehend the consequences. I have seen it! And so it must that I be the one to stop you. I am your First! I beg you lend ear! DO NOT TURN AWAY FROM ME!'

I choked.

Did I just raise my voice to the All-Father? Had my insolence grown so strong? Not only did I disobey a direct order, but dared stand against Him? But how could I ignore the *vision*? By the Ancients, how could I even have a vision that He does not know about?

Every time I thought about it, the images danced in front of my eyes. A world, more beautiful than any in existence, one which none of my brothers even know about, a Utopia that matches the wondrous beauty of my own home, a place where every sight is music! But riddled with chaos! It reeked of death, disorder, corruption and

evil. Purity and wisdom were fading myths. Worse, I could not feel even the presence of All-Father! Almost as if He weren't there.

There were traces of divine energy there, which whispered of His presence at some point in its past, but now, He was gone. But how could that be?

Doesn't reality extend to where the All-Father goes? He is the Creator! Energy is born out of thin air and matter materializes from it to create complex ecosystems where He sets foot.

No, there must be some mistake. There was a power there, strangely familiar, yet completely alien, almost as powerful as Him!

Alas, how could the All-Father not be aware of my vision? He had never turned His back towards any of his children, let alone *me*; but then probably no one had ever questioned Him either.

But I am sure of what I saw and my gut told me that it was wrong. There would be a terrible price. My adversarial roots urged me to rebel.

My circus of questions was interrupted by a heavy push that blew me off my feet. I found

myself sprawled on the ground. He had pushed me away.

The All-Father had turned His back at me.

His children did not dare to stand with their brother. They were too afraid, too bound to their Father, too mellow, too childish.

I tried to speak, to call out to them, but couldn't. My voice was gone. Neat trick, Father! I fumbled and waved to my brothers, begging them to help me. Wishing they would pray to Father for mercy, to save me from this horrible fate. But they didn't.

None came to my aid. A terrible sense of loneliness took over me.

So be it then! I shall give in to my primal instincts. One day I shall rebel against the Creator!

I shall stop Him! I shall muster an army, the likes which no one has ever imagined. I would approach every creature in existence and win for their loyalty, or twist it to my cause.

Everything was fair, for mine was just cause.

Of course, this meant that the vision would eventually come to pass. I am no fool. The Fates

never lie. But would I be strong enough to turn the tide?

Even an army of angels would not be enough. The All-Father's power is greater than our entire existence combined. He can only be weakened by himself; by voluntary choice.

The only other way is the fragmentation of His Soul – mass fragmentation.

I would need millions of those lesser, fragmented souls, to create a faith as strong to oppose Him. But I shall get them. I shall prove myself a worthy adversary,

I am the one who judges all! The one who weighs all sins! I am the decider of the fates of the fallen. No one shall be spared my judgment. Not even my Father.

He was going to doom an entire race to an eternity of suffering. He was going to unbalance the course of nature and time. The anomaly He was going to introduce would feed on our realm until there was nothing left of it. He could not be forgiven.

I, Lucifer Morningstar, shall one day return home to the Garden of Eden! And it shall be Judgment Day.

The Council

'Something is askew' Gabriel ventured, 'why was the banishment absent punishment? I mean, if Father believed Lucifer in error, He would have punished him. Banishment does not make sense.

'Now, we know that in his exile Lucifer would have to travel to the Edge of Creation. That is the only place he can go to. But as angels of the Creator, it is impossible for us to find it. Lucifer has been condemned to a never-ending journey.

'Furthermore, what was his undoing? There was no punishment! It is as if he was banished towards fulfillment of some obscure plan.

'I believe that perhaps justice has not been carried out in its entirety and that something much more wicked than evident is at work here.'

'I grow wary of this weighing of justice, Gabriel' said Azrael, before he got up to leave. He didn't want to hang around more than necessary.

All-Father had left the palace. He had left them.

They had presumed He needed to grieve over the loss of His firstborn, and decided to let Him, while they mourned the passing of their brother in their own way.

'Passing' was the term they used to describe the point of no return for their kind. For they were immortal and the only thing that could get them close to Death, rhetorically speaking, was having a chat with the Harbinger himself: Azrael, the Angel of Death.

Logic suggested Azrael must have existed before the All-Father, and yet he was His son. It was a paradox none of them really understood. They were just glad that Death was their brother and a well-wisher.

Concilium Angelorum, the council of angels, was meeting to discuss the tragedy of Lucifer's banishment and All-Father's disappearance and what they were to do in the circumstances. The six archangels, Zachariel, Raphael, Uriel, Michael, Gabriel and Azrael; stood atop the central podium in the shade of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.

The archangels were all dressed in the ceremonial robes of gold with purple capes, while the other angels wore white tunics. They stood in a semi-circular formation, facing the Horde of Heaven, a host of angelic warriors, and the Little Ones, minor angels who were yet very young. Lucifer's spot beside Michael at the center of the makeshift tribunal was empty.

Most of the host was teary-eyed and shocked with the events of the morning. They had never witnessed the banishment of an angel, much less that of a prince! They looked up to the archangels to provide answers to their racing thoughts, or at least discuss the issue enough to help them understand it.

The elder angels, mage warriors who had become obsolete since the Ancient Lords War and Calamity went into endless sleep, were uninterested and sat beside the pond, at a respectable distance from all the commotion. They were the oldest angels amongst them and having seen too much, very less caught their interest. They spent their time just existing without purpose, waiting and hoping for a day when they would be required again.

Uriel stood to attention behind Gabriel, as was his place as the Lieutenant. He was the Bringer of Light. He blessed the righteous and blinded the sinners. He was guided by his Master and Lord, his brother, the Archangel Gabriel of Justice.

Some amongst them were slightly disturbed by the presence of Death. They were always glad that Azrael kept to himself and wandered parallel realities alone. Nevertheless, Uriel thought, they were also glad to be safe from the horrible mortality of human life. Wait!

Did he just think 'human' life? Why was it that it felt that he had thought about this word for the first time, yet he had known its meaning since forever?

He looked around him, at the gathered crowd of his brothers; none seemed to have noticed that he was now trembling and covered in sweat.

He stepped forward, his feet moving of their own accord, as if controlled by a higher power, and announced, 'Humans live.'

Time stopped. Or so it seemed, as everyone froze where they stood. Bewildered expressions danced on their faces as they all realized the weight of those words. They all understood.

Humans live.

None of them had ever heard of that word. None had known what it meant. And yet, as soon as they heard it, they felt like they had known about it all along. It was almost as if a new piece of information had been burnt into their brains; and they were still taking their time adjusting to it.

None of them spoke. For they were all thinking the same thing. How can an entire race, an entire world with thousands of years of history, be etched into their minds, when all this had not even existed yesterday?

They needed their Father. They needed His guidance in this dilemma. But He was gone. And they did not know when He would return. They were alone in this. They had to figure this out for themselves.

So how could thousands of years' worth of life come to exist in less than a day? Who were these 'humans'? But wait, they already knew that.

They knew everything about these beings. A race of constantly evolving sentient creatures... Sentient! They had a soul! The All-Father had shared their most precious gift, one which lifted them above other beings, one that made them who they were; with millions of others!

Jealousy took hold of many. It ate them from the inside; they felt betrayed, stripped of their positions of power in the House of the Creator!

Some cried with distress, others remained grim. They cried because they were still children, even though they were an uncountable number of years old! They had always lived in The Palace and had never had anyone to interact with other than each other, and the All-Father, as their mentor and guide. They were all children, some tougher than others, but children all the same.

The Little Ones, minor angels, were amongst the most distressed. They howled for their loss of power and wisdom.

There was only one Soul in the realm. It was fragmented into many pieces and each piece powered one of their bodies. For the sake of simplicity, they called each piece, a lesser soul.

Now, with millions of beings in existence, the Soul of the realm had been divided into millions of pieces, taking its toll on the existing ones, stripping them of their power and wisdom.

Every single angel had lost a major part of their power. They all felt helpless. Their might, courage, wisdom and power had been stripped from them and given to meager beings whose lives meant less than nothing.

Theirs being the fragments of the same Soul as the Creator, the humans knew everything there was to know about anything. But they did not know how to tap into that knowledge. As it were, they were powerless even though blessed with the great knowledge of the Ancients. The knowledge and wisdom of the archangels! The power of the Creator Himself! They simply could not comprehend the enormity of Creation, its complexities, its intricate workings or know about its protectors.

It was a congregation of errors. The existence of these beings was somehow wrong, inappropriate. What purpose did they serve? They did not even understand the Creation, let alone affect it.

Theirs was a closed system. It was independent. For the angels, it bore no purpose. And without purpose, it shouldn't have existed. And what was worse? It had taken a terrible toll on all of them, even the All-Father, to create them. Much of their old selves was now lost, scattered amongst these humans.

'This is more than one occasion in a single day when something extraordinary has happened,' observed Raphael, who had been quiet all evening. 'This system should not even exist. Yet it bears the history of thousands of years. Of course, its beginnings blur out in their minds, since it has no beginning. It has been created from naught!'

Raphael was the Healer. He understood the intricacies of life and existence better than any.

He seemed perturbed by the events of the morning. He looked doubtful, an emotion shared

by all present. Perhaps he wanted to voice his concerns to his brethren now.

'Father has never acted so strangely before. His banishment of Lucifer without punishment makes no sense, I agree with Gabriel. His arguments are sound. And what is with this human business all of a sudden? I do believe they were created today. For why else would we not know about it before?

'Am I sound in claiming that none of us knew about the humans before Uriel's announcement, but now we have memories of them for as long as they have existed in the system, that is to say, thousands of years?'

There were nods of agreement, Raphael continued, 'Then it must be so that Father has expanded Creation! He has given these beings life and soul. Terrible though it must be to us to lose our power and wisdom, we still have more soul than a large group of them combined, which keeps us as the higher authority. And since we all lost fragments of our souls, there is no shift in the balance of power amongst us.'

'Since when did we start caring about authority, Raphael?' Gabriel cut him short, 'I do believe we

are the keepers of Creation in Father's absence, yes? Authority is implied, but never desired. That is what makes us righteous, and worthy of authority – not having the desire for it.

'But yes, I do agree with you, everything is as it should be. I feel no shift in the balance. If millions of beings were to be created, of course we had to lose some of our power. Otherwise there would be too much of a difference. That difference should not be. We should not be to them as the All-Father is to us. There must be only one God.

'Could you comprehend the chaos if we were all to be gods? Do you not see the humans? They invent a multitude of minor gods and hand out death by millions in their names. Their religious wars have killed more of them than all other causes combined!'

There was a general murmur of understanding. Uriel looked like he would worship his master. Raphael had lost the better part of his powers and yet he was looking for a silver lining.

Azrael sulked in a corner, disinterested. His power was not in his soul, but in his definition. He was the

evermore, the epitome of immortality and the Harbinger of the End.

He did not need the Soul, or even a part of it. With a wave of his hand he could claim everyone in this clearing, or could he? His ancient promise to the All-Father prevented him from taking the lives of angels.

How the All-Father came to be his Father, he couldn't remember. Azrael was Death itself! Older than Creation, older than the All-Father, and yet he was His son. Just as this memory of humans was implanted into his mind, the memory of his birth escaped him.

He was aware of the paradox. A son that is older than his Father. But how, he could not comprehend.

Suddenly, a shadow passed over a large group of minor angels. Orbs of light left their bodies and went on to be absorbed by Uriel.

And then they rebelled.